UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A//51/6 (Prog. 14)
6 May 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fifty-first session

# PROPOSED MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1998-2001

## Programme 14. Economic and social development in Africa

CONTENTS


| | Paragraphs | Page |
|---|---|---|
| Programme 14. Economic and social development in Africa . | 14.1 - 14.30 | 2 |
| Subprogrammes: | | |
| 14.1 Facilitating economic and social policy analysis ..... | 14.6 - 14.7 | 2 |
| 14.2 Enhancing food security and sustainable development ..... | 14.8 - 14.15 | 3 |
| 14.3 Strengthening development management ..... | 14.16 - 14.21 | 5 |
| 14.4 Harnessing information for development ..... | 14.22 - 14.24 | 6 |
| 14.5 Promoting regional cooperation and integration | 14.25 - 14.30 | 7 |


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14.1 The overall orientation of this programme is to promote economic and social development in Africa. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), which is responsible for the implementation of the programme, will seek to achieve this objective mainly through advocacy for policy measures and actions for adoption by African countries as well as the international community.

14.2 The mandate of the programme derives from Economic and Social Council resolution 671 (XXV) of 29 April 1958, by which the Commission was entrusted with the responsibility, among other things, to initiate and participate in measures for facilitating concerted actions for the economic development of Africa, including its social aspects, with a view to raising the level of economic activity and levels of living in Africa, and for maintaining and strengthening the economic relations of countries and territories of Africa, both among themselves and with other countries of the world. This has been further elaborated in a number of subsequent General Assembly, Economic and Social Council and Commission resolutions.

14.3 The broad approach to be followed will focus on the following five areas: (a) facilitating economic and social policy analysis; (b) ensuring food security and sustainable development; (c) strengthening development management; (d) harnessing information for development; and (e) promoting regional cooperation and integration. Two cross-cutting programme considerations will underpin the five areas. These are the promotion of women in development and capacity-building.

14.4 Gender will become a cross-cutting theme in all of the Commission's programme strategies. This is not merely a matter of justice but of choosing more effective development strategies. The second cross-cutting theme - capacity-building - is recognized as an important missing link in Africa's development. Several activities that will be undertaken in the different areas will be directed at supporting the efforts of member States in building human, institutional and infrastructural capacities. The renewed emphasis on capacity-building and utilization in the Commission's work stems from the recognition that lack of critical capacities is a major contributory factor to Africa's persistent poor economic performance.

14.5 By the end of the period covered by the plan, the programme is expected to enhance significantly the capacity of member States individually and collectively for effective policy formulation and implementation that would enable them to address the development challenges facing them.

Subprogramme 14.1 Facilitating economic and social policy analysis

14.6 There is now much wider recognition that the true measure of economic development is in the social progress that it generates. Indeed, the strategy that has proved most effective in improving economic and social well-being has consisted of three elements: (a) fostering growth that increases the use of labour - the biggest asset of the poor; (b) investments in education and health; and (c) assistance to the poor.

14.7 The main objectives of the subprogramme, for which the Economic and Social Policy Analysis Division is responsible, are as follows:

(a) To increase the capacity of member States to take appropriate measures to respond to the emerging regional and global developments of significance to Africa's economic and social development. In this regard, the results of the research and policy analysis on the performance of the African economy and on a wide range of micro- and macroeconomic as well as on international economic policy issues will serve as a basis for policy dialogue with and advice to African policy makers. ECA will also enhance its role as the regional clearinghouse in order to spread lessons drawn from best practices within the region. Furthermore, ECA will canvass existing capacities within and outside the region so as to provide intellectual support to member States to enable them to pursue development initiatives;

(b) To improve access of women to education, including science and technology, health and employment opportunities. Equally important is the enhancement of the leadership role of women in decision-making in both the public and private sectors. This will be achieved through awareness raising and by facilitating dialogue between policy makers and community leaders and through research and technical assistance;

(c) To promote higher education reforms. Tertiary educational institutions, mainly the universities in Africa, are in severe crisis. They are underfunded and the quality of learning has deteriorated. There is a huge outflow of skilled teachers to the private sector or to foreign countries. Consequently, these institutions are not able to fulfil their main mission, which is to serve as centres of research and training. Special efforts will also be devoted to exploiting information technology to disseminate ECA information resources and those of other institutions to alleviate the problem of shortages of instructional materials in African universities;

(d) With regard to the fight against poverty, ECA activities, in collaboration with other United Nations agencies, will aim at reinforcing the actions of Governments by indicating what is and is not working;

(e) To monitor the implementation of international initiatives and programmes dedicated to or relevant to Africa's development, including the recently launched United Nations system Special Initiative on Africa.

Subprogramme 14.2 Enhancing food security and sustainable development

14.8 No cluster of issues has eluded effective public policy in Africa as much as those interlinking food security, population and environmental degradation. Mainly as a result of a high rate of population growth and environmental degradation, food production per capita in Africa has been declining over the past three decades. Survival and the quality of life in Africa will only be guaranteed if the forces that shape the food-population-environment equation are properly understood and managed. There is both a need, therefore, for strong dialogue on these issues in each African country and for strengthening the capacity of African Governments to manage this equation effectively.

14.9 One objective of this subprogramme, which is implemented by the Food and Sustainable Development Division, will be to enhance locally based analytical capabilities for national policy-making and implementation in the areas of food

security, population growth and environmental management. In addition, the secretariat will facilitate the adoption of appropriate macroeconomic measures to promote socially acceptable, economically viable and environmentally sustainable development.

14.10 Africa has several environmental problems. Desertification is accelerating. Deforestation is increasing as more people rely on wood for fuel. Urbanization is exacerbating pollution in cities. Recurring cycles of drought in parts of Africa threaten sustainable livelihoods in environmentally marginal areas. Policy measures to overcome various forms of environmental degradation have been articulated in many international environmental conventions and programmes. Another objective of this subprogramme will therefore be to strengthen the decision-making, legal and institutional capacities of African Governments to facilitate the implementation of conventions on sustainable development related to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, among others.

14.11 Water is increasingly becoming a problematic derivative of the food-population-environment equation in many parts of Africa. Competition for water is also growing with the acceleration of urbanization. Increasing the reliability of water supply is key to increasing food and agricultural production in Africa. To that end, the secretariat will provide technical support to member States sharing common water resources to work out agreements and to establish mechanisms for the effective and sustainable management of such resources. Similar support will also be provided to Governments in their efforts to strengthen arrangements for the development of inter-State lake and river basins in Africa.

14.12 Human settlements and the issues of food, population and environment are intricately linked. In this regard, the subprogramme will aim at strengthening the policy-making capacity of African countries in human settlement issues and in so doing help in managing those complex linkages.

14.13 In the Dakar/Ngor Declaration on Population, Family and Sustainable Development (1992), African Governments for the first time adopted quantitative demographic targets to be reached by countries of the region between 2000 and 2010 in terms of reducing annual population growth rate and mortality rates (infant, childhood and maternal) and increasing life expectancy and contraceptive prevalence rate. Thus, another objective of this subprogramme will be to support African countries to implement measures and actions to strengthen their population policies. In so doing, the secretariat will also highlight best practices.

14.14 Progress in the implementation of population and environmentally sustainable agricultural policies will depend crucially on women's response to policy measures being fostered in those areas. The objective in this context is to assist member States to implement measures that would increase awareness of and acceptance by women of policy measures in the food-population-environment equation.

14.15 Building an endogenous scientific and technological capability has long been recognized as vital in addressing Africa's development, in particular the

issues related to the various aspects of the food-population-environment equation. In this regard, the secretariat will assist member States to promote the application of science and technology in dealing with issues of food security and environmental management.

Subprogramme 14.3 Strengthening development management

14.16 Promoting development involves a partnership among the public and private sectors and voluntary organizations. Strengthening the managerial and institutional capacity of those sectors is essential to enhancing their role in development.

14.17 Effective public sector management is key to sustained growth and development. This requires a competent, accountable and responsive public service. Strengthening institutions of accountability will be one of the objectives of this subprogramme, which is implemented by the Development Management Division. This will require the creation of civil society organs in member States that would ensure that public officials - both elected and appointed - uphold and adhere to ethical standards of public service. The second objective is strengthening of the civil service systems. This will involve assisting member States to develop standards and indicators for monitoring civil service performance. The third objective will be promoting decentralization of administrative power aiming at strengthening the leadership and capacity of institutions of local governance.

14.18 Under private sector development, one area of focus will be strengthening micro- and informal sector enterprises, which are the main sources of employment and income in a number of African countries. Two objectives will be pursued:

(a) Assistance to Governments to improve incentive frameworks for those enterprises and to help them to form associations through which they can articulate their needs and also improve their management capacities. Particular emphasis will be given to improving access of women to credit to develop enterprises;

(b) Creation of an enabling environment for private sector-led development through assistance to Governments to reform their regulatory frameworks, which are so vital for private sector operations.

14.19 Progress has been made in fostering the notion of popular participation, as articulated in the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation. As democratic systems of governance take hold in Africa, civil society groups are growing in number and importance and are increasingly influencing a wide range of public policies. The objective is to strengthen the capacity of civil society groups for analysis and effective advocacy on public policy.

14.20 Government and the private sector have mutually reinforcing roles to play in accelerating the pace of industrialization in Africa. The General Assembly has proclaimed two industrial development decades in Africa. The Second United Nations Industrial Development Decade for Africa covers the period 1993-2002. The objectives to be pursued include:

(a) The enhancement of industrial competitiveness of member States and the building and strengthening of technical skills;

(b) Assistance to member States to enable them to develop their industrial manpower, including ensuring the viability and sustainability of selected regional technical institutes.

14.21 South-South cooperation is an important vehicle for strengthening private sector development. One objective in this area would be to devise mechanisms that would enable African countries to benefit from the experience of but also attract investments from other developing regions. Assisting member States to develop their financial and capital markets will therefore be an important element in the effort to attract significant flows of investment resources into Africa.

Subprogramme 14.4 Harnessing information for development

14.22 Information is becoming as important a resource for production as land and human and financial capital. As with other resources, so comes value added with processing information, which is harnessed increasingly by technology. Timely and reliable information and data are vital for economic policy-making in the public sector and for business decisions by private economic agents. Lower-cost informatics technologies alone could revolutionize education, marketing and hundreds of other applications. Africa will not have to make costly investments in older technologies as did other regions before investing in lower-cost technologies. Africa needs to develop the capacity to tap into the global system of information and knowledge and adapt them to solve its problems, including data management. The Development Information Services Division is responsible for the implementation of the subprogramme.

14.23 In the area of development information system, the objectives will be:

(a) Promotion of the development of information infrastructure by encouraging member States to enter into policy dialogue with a view to addressing issues of computer networking, regulatory and pricing policy, including taxes;

(b) Strengthening the capacity to organize and disseminate Africa's development information on the Internet, as well as making the resources of the ECA library accessible to African academic community, policy makers and research institutions through electronic connectivity.

14.24 In the area of statistical development, the objectives will be the development and maintenance of regional databases for economic, social, demographic and environmental statistics, and strengthening the capacity of member States to improve their national statistical systems in line with the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s.

Subprogramme 14.5 Promoting regional cooperation and integration

14.25 The entry into force of the Abuja Treaty on the establishment of the African Economic Community provides a major impetus for the work of ECA in the area of regional cooperation.

14.26 Strengthening of subregional organizations is the main task envisaged in the first five years of the Abuja Treaty. The objectives of the Commission are to enhance the institutional capacities of the subregional organizations in consolidating their integration, rationalizing the myriad of organizations dedicated to integration within each subregion and accelerating the process of cross-border liberalization and harmonization in trade, investment and monetary and fiscal policies.

14.27 ECA support for sectoral activities in the various subregional groupings during the period 1998-2001 will be based on and consistent with the priorities that have been defined by member States. Major efforts will be needed from member States to ensure that the subregional organizations have predictable and assured financial resources for their operations. To that end, the subprogramme will promote self-financing mechanisms for the subregional economic groupings.

14.28 The development of infrastructures is essential to linking economic spaces in the integration process. The objective in this area will be to assist African countries to implement the Second United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa, 1991-2000. The subprogramme will concentrate on four key areas, namely, human resource development, institutional development, regional transport and communications linkages and facilitation, and a transport and communications database.

14.29 Mineral and energy resource development is one area that is particularly suitable for regional cooperation. Intercountry cooperation in the areas of electric power and gas has began to emerge in Africa. This needs to be more widespread. The objective will be to foster such a pattern by facilitating private sector initiatives as well as necessary government interventions.

14.30 The Economic Cooperation and Integration Division is responsible for the implementation of this subprogramme.

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